



Box (Buxus) - Growing Advice

Thank you for your interest in Buxus plants from Palmstead Nurseries. Buxus is a very popular and regular seller, but there is a risk that plants may suffer from a fungal infection known as "Box Blight" which is now becoming quite widespread. Our experience so far is that this infection affects a relatively small proportion of Buxus plantings and the risks are usually very low if plants are well planted and maintained. As no other plant performs quite as well as box it is therefore important to maintain this plant in its optimum condition and managing the risk becomes highly worthwhile.

At Palmstead we sell plants propagated from clean stock which are grown on our nursery, as well as supplying plants produced by partner growers in Holland & Belgium (the centre of Buxus growing in Europe). However, all growers of Buxus including Palmstead are treating their plants regularly with fungicides to help prevent fungal diseases, including the two fungal infections causing "Box Blight". No grower is risking their crop by not applying a regular treatment and none can guarantee their plants are free of the fungal spores which are now widespread. Current RHS advisors consider that these treatments suppress the fungus but do not always kill it off. However, they are not advising against planting or to remove Buxus but suggest it is managed by best practise. Our best advice at this time is to continue with regular treatments of the plants in their planted locations. Unfortunately, we cannot be liable for issues developing in planted locations where this maintenance is not carried out.

While there may be fungal spores harbouring on plants and in the site soils, or possibly distributed from nearby Buxus plantings and other sources, it usually takes a trigger for infections to take hold. For example, humidity and/or stress; warm and humid conditions favour fungal infections. However, plants with good air flow around them, good light levels rather than deep shade and plants in good health and vigour will be far more resistant to infection. Plants stressed by drought or lack of irrigation, wet soils or other reasons may also succumb. Buxus is great for topiary shapes, but these dense bushes do not have good air flow and therefore can be more susceptible to "Box Blight" infections. There are both cultural and chemical treatments available to maintain your plants health and vigour and we highly recommend the following practices:

- Good husbandry with regular removal of old leaf litter;

- Cutting out and burning any infected parts of the plant; it will be stimulated to re-grow;
- Do not water overhead as soil based watering is better; watering heavily once a week and not daily, allowing the foliage to dry out between watering's;
- Plant Buxus plants so they have good air flow around them and good light levels, some gardeners give it a clear boot space before planting other plants;
- Mulching helps considerably by reducing spore movement by rain splash; mulch around the plants with straw, woodchip, bark or pine needles which will absorb some of the raindrop energy and reduce splash bounce;
- Feeding – Buxus are hungry plants and will flush with new growth in April, June and August; a light dressing of quick release fertilizer just before these flushes will promote healthy growth. Do not over feed as very soft growth may be more susceptible – follow recommendations. Other recommendations from gardeners include using a bio-stimulant such as **SB Plant Invigorator**, as healthy plants are more resistant to infections;
- A monthly to 6-8 weekly application of the plant tonic **Top Buxus Health Mix** during the growing season (March - October) will feed and strengthen the plant and improve vigour. It also contains some copper and sulphur which have anti-fungal properties. It is not a pesticide so spraying certificates are not required;
- Clipping plants at the right time - traditional trimming advises trim 1 mid-May - June, trim 2 September – October. The best practice advice now recommends one trim a year in September in dry, cool and perhaps windy conditions. Avoid clipping in bright hot sunshine which can cause leaf scorch. Comb through the plants to collect and remove all clippings. Clean all pruning equipment between plants;
- Fungicides for domestic use are available in garden centres and currently the fungicides **Bayer Fungus Fighter** (tebuconazole) and **Bayer Fungus Fighter Plus** (tebuconazole and trifloxystrobin) carry label recommendations for use against box blight. Both can be applied without any formal certification but do read and follow the label instructions;
- Professional fungicides are also available for professional users and most nurseries will rotate 2-3 fungicides to keep their crops clean and reduce the risk of resistance. Palmstead use (as of 2016) Signum; Octave or Switch. Always read the label carefully for use by suitably certified, competent persons only. This information is offered as a guide only; and
- Regular maintenance and inspection can nip infections in the bud by pruning out infected areas as soon as possible and treating to encourage new growth. Infections left untreated may make plants unsightly or even kill them.

For up-to-date and independent advice on Buxus click these links to the RHS web pages:

About Box Blight: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=96>

About Box generally: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=88>

Alternative plants are being considered:

Ilex crenata – The Thornless Japanese Holly is one of the replacement front runners but is more open in habit and a slower grower; it does form a good bush and takes clipping well but is not as easy to grow as Buxus. It is perhaps a little more expensive too.

***Euonymus japonica* varieties** (e.g. 'Jean Hughes' / 'Green Rocket') - Can make good plants but cultivar 'Jean Hughes' is in very scarce supply. It may come on the scene in a couple of years as production gears up.

Teucrium – Not as hardy as Buxus and not particularly similar.

Lonicera nitida and the similarly shrubby Honeysuckles ***L. pileata*** – Small leaved and take clipping well but good only for low hedges (under 1.2m) as they can fall apart if grown taller. Needs a good 'A' frame hedge format for these if above 90cm tall. Needs clipping 2-3 times a year.

The RHS also suggest these alternatives:

Berberis buxifolia 'Pygmaea'

Berberis × *stenophylla* 'Corallina Compacta'

Berberis × *stenophylla* 'Irwinii'

Berberis × *stenophylla* 'Nana'

Berberis thunbergii 'Atropurpurea Nana' AGM

Euonymus fortunei (various cultivars)

Hebe cupressoides 'Boughton Dome'

Lavandula angustifolia cultivars

Osmanthus delavayi AGM

Rosmarinus officinalis

Santolina chamaecyparissus AGM

Taxus baccata 'Semperaurea' AGM

What does this Box Blight infection look like?

Box Blight is one or both of two fungi: *Cylindrocladum buxicola* and *Volutella buxi*. Both moulds cause dying foliage and branches. If you find it you need to cut out the infected parts, collect all leaf litter and dispose of by burning or using council green waste hot composting. Then promptly treat the plant with **Top Buxus Health Mix** or a fungicide and follow our cultural recommendations above. The plant will regrow and respond well.

Cylindrocladum buxicola

The infection starts with black spots on the leaves and after a few days these affected leaves start to fall off and black stripes appear on the young twigs.



Volutella buxi

The infection starts with the leaves turning brown, then wither and for a while remain fixed to the branch. On the underside the leaves turn pale and pink mould spores appear.

